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INFO RUCNCOM/EC CARICOM COLLECTIVE
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RUEHUJA/AMEMBASSY ABUJA 0023
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C O N F I D E N T I A L KINGSTON 002020

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STATE FOR WHA/CAR (RANDALL BUDDEN)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/09/2016

TAGS: PGOV PREL ECON EPET KCOR JML XL XX

SUBJECT: JAMAICA: TRAFIGURA SCANDAL MAY AFFECT TIMING OF GENERAL ELECTIONS

Classified By: Ambassador Brenda LaGrange Johnson for reasons 1.4 (b) a nd (d).

¶1. (C) The Trafigura scandal delineated septel has forced the resignation of Colin Campbell, Minister of Information and Development and PNP General Secretary, and may cause the Prime Minister to wait to call elections until late next year. Prior to this latest imbroglio, many observers had speculated that Prime Minister Portia Simpson Miller (PSM) of the ruling People's National Party (PNP) would call elections as early as this fall. However, given the political fall-out from the scandal and the resignation of Campbell, one of her closest and most powerful advisors, PSM may decide to hold off on calling elections in hopes the scandal will blow over.

¶2. (C) At his request, on October 10 Emboffs met with James Robertson, an influential figure within the Opposition Jamaica Labor Party (JLP) and Member of Parliament for St. Thomas Western, to discuss the scandal. According to Robertson, such scandals tend to be forgotten quickly in Jamaica, and the public is very forgiving when it comes to corruption. He said he is worried that, because of the imbroglio, PSM will wait until next year to call elections; unlike the PNP, the JLP does not have sufficient funding to maintain its current campaign efforts until late 2007. Robertson speculated that if the Trafigura scandal explodes, incriminating much of the PNP's leadership, PSM may be forced to resign and call snap elections to replace the entire government.

¶3. (C) Robertson also mentioned the JLP motion of no confidence in the government that was tabled in Parliament that same day. According to Robertson, the motion is unlikely to pass when it goes to vote on October 17; however, Robertson stated it was important to get PNP Members of Parliament on the record supporting a government that is "unethical" and "criminal."

¶4. (C) Robertson also stated that the JLP would pursue the affair vigorously and would follow the trail wherever it led-- and this could include PSM. Robertson noted that four senior GOJ officials recently had met with executives from Trafigura in New York, and was curious as to whether PSM had been among them. (Note: on Oct. 11, PSM publicly admitted that she had been present at this meeting, but claimed to have known nothing of any transfer of funds. End Note.) However, Robertson observed, the JLP is hesitant to pursue PSM too vigorously, since she is loved by the Jamaican people, even if not within her own divided party. Robertson

went so far as to describe PSM as more popular with the people than any previous Jamaican prime ministers, including Michael Manley and P.J. Patterson.

¶15. (C) Robertson made it quite clear that the "playing field is not level", contending that viable democracy is under threat in Jamaica as a result of outside influence. He pointed out that Petro Caribe funds are under no Parliamentary oversight or scrutiny, and that they will be used to maintain the political status quo (comment: echoing concerns expressed by JLP MP Audley Shaw to EconOff).

¶16. (C) Comment. At least for the moment, Robertson's speculation that the Trafigura scandal could explode, leading to a collapse of Government and snap elections, still looks unlikely. It seems more probable that PSM will wait to call elections in hopes the scandal will be forgotten-- like so many previous imbroglios in Jamaica. Robertson was clearly angling for USG support, although he acknowledged that the Embassy could not afford to be seen as anything other than neutral. End Comment.

JOHNSON